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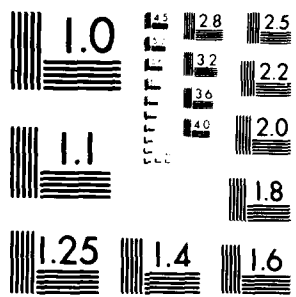
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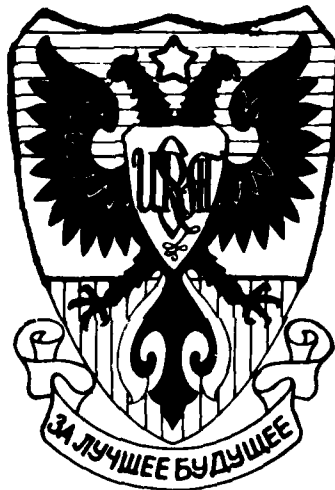


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THE SOVIET VIEW OF LOCAL WARS AND WARS
OF NATIONAL LIBERATION: STRATEGY AND
CONCEPTS OF EMPLOYMENT
CPT EDWARD S. PUSEY
1981

GARMISCH, GERMANY

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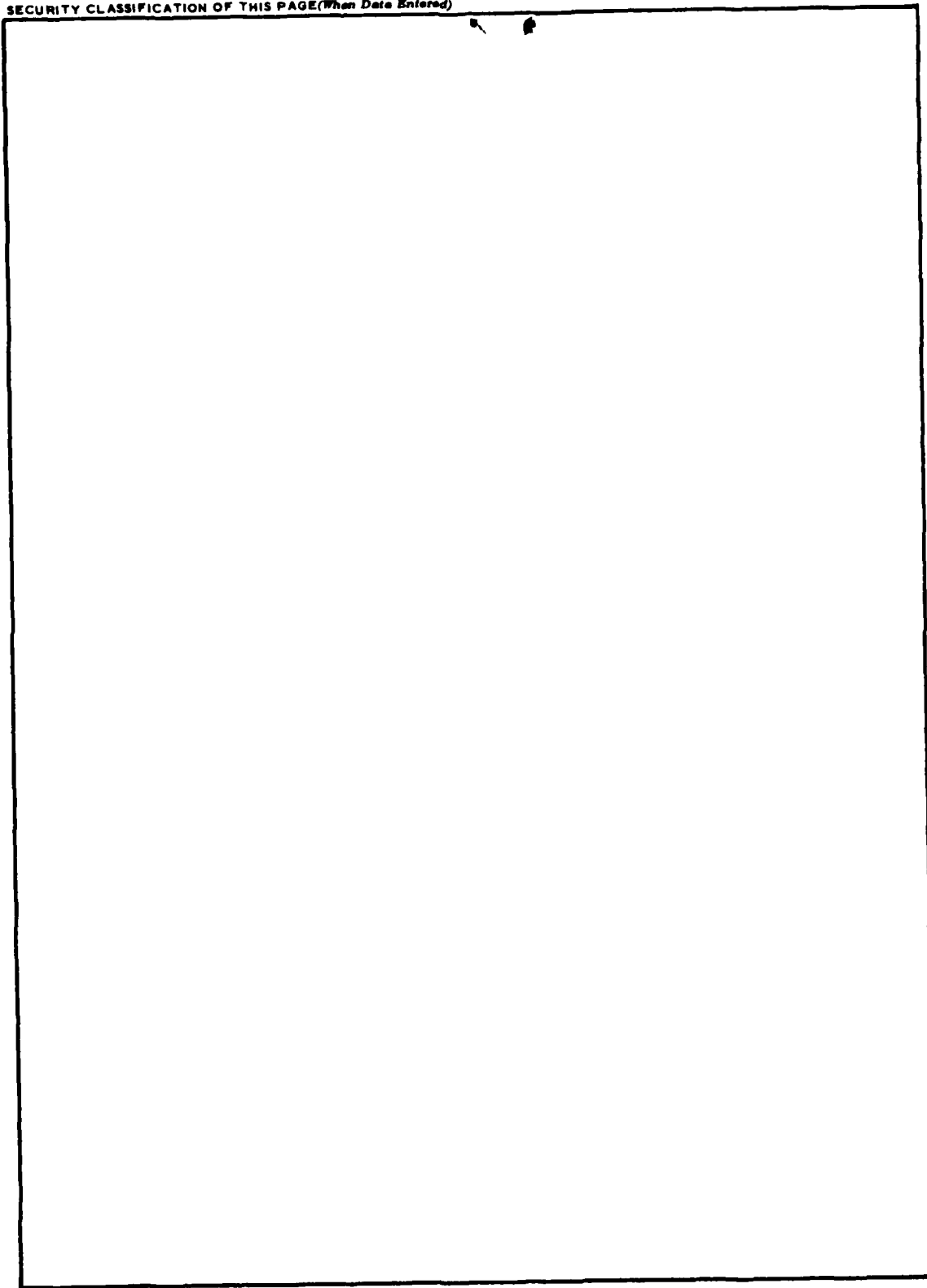
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THE SOVIET VIEW OF LOCAL WARS AND WARS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION:
STRATEGY AND CONCEPTS OF EMPLOYMENT

Captain Edward S. Pusey

June 1981

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FOREWORD

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SUMMARY

In this paper the author examines the Soviet view of local wars and wars of national liberation. He describes the Soviet theoretical premises for causes of these wars and their role in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Using Soviet sources, the author describes the historical course of local wars and wars of national liberation and the strategy and concepts of employment that the Soviet Union intends to use to insure victory in a timely manner. He concludes that the local war, or the national liberation war, from the Soviet point of view, is and will continue to be a viable foreign policy option for the Soviet Union.

THE SOVIET VIEW OF LOCAL WARS AND WARS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION:
STRATEGY AND CONCEPTS OF EMPLOYMENT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the contemporary historical phenomenon of local wars and wars of national liberation from a Soviet point of view, and in so doing, to provide the reader with a conceptual framework, based on Soviet references, that will "explain" the causes of local wars and wars of national liberation, their categorization, and perhaps most important, the strategy and concepts of employment attached to them. This analysis, of course, must be caveated by several points.

It must be recognized that the presentation of a Soviet point of view by its very nature must include, as a minimum, some anti-Western biases. There is no empirical guarantee that what the Soviets say is truth as we perceive it. Nevertheless the sources cited herein are deemed representative of what is put forth as "official" for both Soviet and international public consumption. Finally, because of the subject -- war -- the Soviets have an innate aversion to revealing their innermost thoughts and identifying them as such. As a result, the Soviet views are often couched in their observations of the actions of other countries and their armies. In this writer's analysis, these observations bear great credence and cannot be discounted merely because they carry no formal acknowledgement of being official doctrine.

In order to properly place the significance of local wars and wars of national liberation into our spectrum of analysis of strategy and concepts, it is worth noting that to the Soviets:

Military strategy has a close connection to politics, flows from it, and serves its policy...The leading role of politics in relation to military strategy consists of the fact that politics develops the goals of war, poses the missions for military strategy, creates the conditions for its execution, and mobilizes the required materiel and personnel resources necessary for war.

...Strategic operations are the basic means of obtaining the political aims of war.¹

It may be deduced from the above that there is, in the Soviet view, a close interconnection between a nation's politics, its decision to wage war, and the strategy with which it will be waged. Thus one finds that:

Soviet military strategy also considers the possibility of the occurrence of local wars, the political character of which is determined from class positions and the Leninist pronouncements on just and unjust wars. Supporting wars of national liberation, the Soviet Union decisively comes out against local wars initiated by imperialists, evaluating not only their reactionary character, but also the great danger connected with the possibility of their turning into world war.²

The above statement points to three significant aspects of the topic of local wars and wars of national liberation. First, local wars and wars of national liberation seem to appear in opposition to each other (this is not completely true, as will be seen later). Second, inherent to them is the danger of escalation to a larger scale. Third, there is a belief in just and unjust wars which will be further discussed below.

The concept of the just or unjust nature of a local war merits some attention because it serves as the justification for the political actions (if they were supported or initiated by the Soviets) that resulted in the war. This approach to the question of whether or not a war is just has its parallel in our own system; i.e., United States' participation in World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the

Vietnamese Conflict, and other interventionary or police actions, was just in that it was undertaken to defend our homeland, our allies, or perhaps to insure unhindered freedom of choice in a given country or region. Considering the importance of "being right" both internally and internationally when involved in or supporting armed conflict, the Soviets have gone to great lengths to provide an in-depth justification for the Leninist foreign policy.

Although the principles are quite simple, their explication is somewhat convoluted. Basically:

Moral-right criteria and principles serves as support for determining the just and legitimate, or unjust and illegitimate character of war. If the implemented policy was imperialistic, then the war flowing from that policy is an imperialistic, unjust war. If the policy was one of national liberation, then the war flowing from it is a national liberation, just war.³

It is apparent from this statement that a local war can be fully justifiable, even if from a Western point of view the "national liberation policy" that caused it was aggressive. As the Soviets explain:

...The progressive classes use revolutionary violence, including war, for the purpose of self defense in the struggle against counterrevolution. Revolutionary violence is a historically transitory and necessary means which results from the societal stage, the destruction of exploitative order, and class and national antagonisms.⁴

The Soviets are gracious enough to concede that war is a two-sided process, but by their definition, a two-sided process that works two ways only part of the time. In other words, a war can be unjust on the part of both antagonistic sides if both are imperialistic, but only one side can wage a just war. "Only the side that is defending its freedom and independence and upholds the progressive line of

societal development can wage a long-term, just war."⁵ It is thus no surprise that the Soviets recognize "only the point of view of the socialist proletariat and its struggle for liberation: we do not recognize other points of view."⁶

Having provided some justification for Soviet involvement in various armed conflicts, more light can be shed on how the Soviets specifically view local wars as part of the ongoing conflict within the international system. Local wars, in their most basic sense, are those "involving a relatively limited number of participants and a limited geographical area."⁷ A basic source of local wars is imperialism's inability to carry on its aggressive policies in any other fashion, such as world war. This is a direct result of the growth of the military-technical might of the socialist brotherhood and development of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union, which has forced the West to reexamine its military strategic concepts.⁸

Because of this inability to wage direct conflict, imperialism is driven to exert its pressure less openly. The result is that:

In contemporary local wars, the opposing sides, as a rule do not remain isolated. Under the existing world correlation of forces and development of international ties, each of the opposing sides is usually supported by other countries. The imperialists attempt, by means of weapons deliveries and other methods, to support the victory of counterrevolutionary forces. The socialist countries and all progressive forces, on the other hand, render assistance and support countries and nations struggling for the just side.

If at this point the contradiction or opposition of local wars to wars of national liberation still appears to exist in full, it should be formally noted that the opposition is one of point of view rather than in the actual physical characteristics of the action itself. This is best elucidated by the Soviet explanation that:

...By its social-political character, contemporary local war is a socio-historical occurrence arising from the bases of class and other contradictions of the contemporary era and taking the form of armed conflict. Local wars can be initiated or provoked by the ruling imperialist governmental circles with the goal of seizing or strengthening economic, political, and strategic positions in various countries and regions of the world and suppressing national liberation and revolutionary movements.

On the other hand, for countries and peoples that are victims of imperialist aggression or political provocation and intrigues, local war is a just, ¹⁰liberating war in their class and national interests.

Thus, the differentiating factor between a local war and a war of national liberation lies primarily in that for which the sides are fighting. The means and methods of the conflicts will be discussed further, but prior to doing so, it may be of value to summarize the Soviet method of evaluating local wars. We find that:

These conclusions (Leninist), by the founder of proletarian revolutionary thought, assist in making the proper Marxist evaluation of the two-sided process of the armed struggle in contemporary local wars -- predatory and reactionary wars on the one hand, and progressive, just, liberation wars on the other. The natural process of the struggle of the peoples against colonialism, national oppression, and aggression is characterized by the appearance of contemporary local wars and military conflicts as a form ¹¹of rebuff to imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism.

The question may surface as to whether or not any concrete examples exist of what we, from a Western point of view, would term calculated, direct involvement of Soviet troops in a local war. As mentioned previously, this is a subject that the Soviets are loathe to discuss. Although references addressing Soviet assistance in arms, equipment, and socialist moral support are replete for conflicts such as those in Korea, Vietnam, Africa and the Middle East, the direct involvement of Soviet troops in a local conflict is not discussed. The most valuable insights we may obtain from Soviet sources are lessons-learned type

features in Soviet publications that, from their compliments, comments and criticisms, indicate how the Soviets believe a local war should be fought.

However, by using the Soviets' own definitions of local wars mentioned above and twisting them a bit to suit the purposes of a Western analyst, the current armed conflict in Afghanistan could certainly be termed a local war in which they are directly involved. Naturally this is not admitted, but the presence of Soviet troops is admitted as well as are the reasons for sending them. In a general sense they say it is because:

...Everywhere we are confronted with the one and same problem -- the necessity for strengthening anti-imperialist solidarity in the interests of liquidating as quickly as possible the last vestiges of racism and colonialism, successfully fighting neocolonialism, and spreading detente to all areas of the globe with the goal of creating the most favorable conditions for the establishment of peace and to overcome the dire consequences of the past.¹²

More specifically, the Soviets provide a realistic description of why the incursion was made into Afghanistan. Brezhnev's words are quoted at length below because they provide two explanations for their action. His statement contains both the "ideological" justification as well as the realpolitik rational for the movement of Soviet troops. Admittedly, some propaganda is inevitable.

It was not an easy decision for us to send a Soviet military contingent into Afghanistan. But the Central Committee and the Soviet Government acted with full realization of its responsibility, having considered the full ramifications of the situation. The only mission put before the Soviet contingent is cooperation with the Afghans in repulsion of external aggression. They will be withdrawn in full from Afghanistan only when the reasons that prompted the Afghan leadership to request their entry are no longer in existence.

The unceasing armed intervention, resulting from the plotting of external reactionary forces, created a real threat of the loss of Afghanistan's independence, the conversion of it into an imperialist military base on the southern border of our country. In other words, the moment arrived when we could no longer turn away from the requests of the Afghanistan government friendly to us. To have acted otherwise would have been to surrender Afghanistan to be destroyed by imperialism, to allow aggressive forces to repeat here what they were able to do, for example in Chile, where a free nation was drowned in blood. To act otherwise would have indicated passive observance while a source of serious threat to the security of the Soviet State arose on our southern border.¹³

The issue of Afghanistan is not to be belabored in this paper. It is mentioned primarily for the reader to reflect on available information provided through Western sources and to make his own observations as to whether or not the Soviets are applying the concepts of local wars which are further discussed below.

The concepts of employment described in the remaining pages are not meant to be all-encompassing or in complete detail. They do, however, address major areas that should be familiar to most readers. These areas include:

1. Command, Control, Coordination and Communications
2. Aviation and Air Defense
3. Ground Operations
4. Armor Operations
5. Airmobile Operations/Helicopters
6. Surprise

In the course of addressing these employment concepts, the Soviet publications that were reviewed had a strong tendency to discuss them primarily in the context of experiences learned during the Korean Conflict, the Vietnamese Conflict, and the repeated Middle East Wars. Their analysis typically is chronological, with emphasis on changes

brought about by modernization of technology and the varying battlefield conditions caused by geography and technological change. The sequence of presentation in this paper does not in and of itself imply a rank ordering, however the reader may wish to consider the degree of emphasis allocated to these topics in Western military circles as a guide and temper it with the degree of importance attributed to each as addressed by the Soviets.

Command and Control

World War II, the Great Patriotic War, and local wars of the postwar period have clearly demonstrated that precise, steadfast and uninterrupted command and control of troops is one of the most important factors in achieving victory over the enemy.¹⁴

Although the principle of command and control remains constant, the Soviets pay particular attention to the evaluation of methods and means to assure proper adherence to the principle. To wit, the changing character of combat operations from World War II to the present appears to have necessitated a progressive movement of command posts closer and closer to the battle itself. Thus, the distant World War II command posts were replaced by mobile armored command posts in Korea and heliborne command posts in Vietnam, the latter of which were deemed the "most effective means of control in mountains and jungles..."¹⁵

Essential to proper functioning of command and control are effective communications means that rely on all facets of unit to unit contact. This entails the use of infantry, artillery and tank unit communications, including teletype and UHF retransmission means to "insure uninterrupted contact with subunits, receive information from them quickly, and effectively issue necessary instructions."¹⁶

Similarly, the Soviet press affirms that another key to effective command and control is centralization of command, which in conjunction with the modernization of communications means, has been perfected to a higher degree by use of advanced technology such as communications satellites. However, the Soviet reader is reminded that:

...The quantitative and qualitative growth in technical means has greatly complicated the organization of troop control and the preparation and conduct of operations in general. From this has immeasurably grown the role¹⁷ of military cadres who have to skillfully master the equipment.

Based on the above information as a general guideline, it may be concluded that command and control, in the current Soviet view, should be strictly centralized, near the battlefield, and supported by multiple communications means and skilled technicians.

Aviation and Air Defense

In the accomplishment of missions, aviation's high mobility, capability to maneuver, and ability to concentrate forces in critical directions were shown to a great degree, making it one of the major strike forces.

In local wars, as a rule, all types of aviation participate: strategic, tactical, carrier and army air.¹⁸

Soviet sources discuss the application of aviation in conjunction with that of air defense, the two being mutually opposed systems each of which is trying to gain the tactical/technical advantage over the other. In view of the current state of the art for these two combat systems, the preferred aviation method of employment is use of low flying aircraft at speeds of around 1000 km/hr in a massive air strike to knock out enemy airfields and radar, followed by secondary strikes to destroy aircraft on the ground.¹⁹

Soviet air defense places primary reliance on four systems to counter enemy aviation. In sequence of importance they are: general guided missile air defense coverage, mutually supporting guided missile air defense systems of units involved in the fighting, fighter interceptors, and anti-aircraft artillery (particularly effective under conditions of active jamming).²⁰ In the Soviet analysis, air defense guided missiles have had the greatest impact on concepts of aviation employment in that they have led to an increase in the number of support aircraft, reduction in the number of strike aircraft, and an increase in the use of active radio jamming against air defense systems.²¹

Future local wars will use the most sophisticated air defense available, and air defense will continue to develop as will radio technical means.²²

Thus, in local wars, aviation was and remains the main strike force...necessary to use at the start of the war with mass and surprise in order to obtain the desired goals. The aviation of the attacking country, operating as a rule under conditions of numerical superiority over the enemy, concentrates its forces on protected rear area objectives and troops. The methods of employment of aviation in local wars are not interchangeable, they are constantly developing with the combat capability of²³ aircraft, armament and modernization of air defense systems.

Ground Operations

Soviet commentary on the employment of troops in local war ground operations shows a realization that the contemporary battlefield is not suited for World War II tactics. Reflecting on the American involvement in Vietnam, the comment is made, as is the implication for future local wars, that it is necessary to adapt to the environment and the tactics of the enemy.²⁴

Particular attention is given to modifications in concepts of employment based on the physical characteristics of the areas involved.

The principles are most basic, but show that a modern army must be capable of conducting operations in varied geographical locations. Thus the use of massive mortar fire, artillery fire and air strikes is appropriate in open terrain, but not in jungles.²⁵ Similarly, mountain operations require the capability of "seizing and holding mountain passes, crossings, peaks and valleys, and striking the flanks and rear of the enemy."²⁶

The singling out of mountain and jungle terrain as peculiarities that require adaptation and changes in tactics may imply that a "normal" environment will be met by conventional Soviet methods of employment. Our Soviet counterparts are basically only willing to state that:

It goes without saying that the physical and geographical conditions of the theater had a major influence on the character, methods and forms of waging combat. Local wars, as a rule, have been waged in specified regions where it has not always been possible to make use of massed tanks, create wide fronts, or use all forms of land maneuvers. This has made an imprint on the forms and methods of combat operations and, on the role of types of armed forces and branches of service.

Armor Operations

As with the comments made above concerning ground (infantry) operations, those on armor deployment tend to reflect changes necessitated by the environment and, in the case of anti-armor, by technology. Reflecting on the 1973 Middle East War, which pitted Soviet armor equipment and presumably concepts of employment against Israel, the Soviets state that:

...Tanks attacked in mass in the first echelons of combat formations, often without supporting infantry. This is exactly why the warring sides had such high equipment losses. Offensive operations of tank units and formations were, at the start of the war, waged on a wide front without having created

superiority in forces and means in the primary directions of advance. In result, in the course of the offense, which most often took the form of meeting engagements,²⁸ the opponents were unable to obtain decisive successes.

It is strongly implied that given the terrain, geographical features, and technology present, the correct course of action was to act with greater initiative, employ the maneuverability of the forces, and avoid frontal attacks. Success could be and was achieved by those who used the above methods and supplemented them by sending diversionary elements into the enemy rear to disrupt control and upset the materiel-equipment support.²⁹

A further point which may indicate Soviet willingness to reevaluate concepts in the face of a changing situation, is the statement, neither directly attributed to the Western press nor refuted by the Soviet writer, a colonel, that:

...The sharp increase in capabilities (of infantry) and constant development of mobile anti-tank guided missiles is leading to the point where combinations of tanks with fighter/bombers,³⁰ it is believed, may no longer be a decisive tactical factor.

It would however, be presumptuous to assume that this indicates a scrapping of traditional armor employment concepts. As was noted above, the failure of the tank operations in the initial stages of the 1973 Middle East War was due in part to the lack of infantry support and also to the failure to establish superiority in forces, not only to anti-tank weaponry. One may conclude that concentrated use of tanks is still an integral part of Soviet doctrine, but that their use will be tempered by the "objective situation" in effect and with due regard for modern anti-tank weaponry.

Airmobile Operations/Helicopters

According to Soviet accounts, helicopters have a significant role in combat operations of local wars. Although not receiving the specific interest rendered to other war fighting means, the use of helicopters receives wide praise in a number of areas.

Helicopters are singled out as being an effective means of enhancing communications in difficult terrain when employed as airborne command posts or radio stations.³¹ In mountainous terrain, wide use of helicopters reduces troop dependence and speeds up the tempo of the attack.³²

Commenting on American use of helicopters in Vietnam, the Soviets notice that:

The wide use of helicopters in war had significant impact on ground forces tactics. It allowed the American command to quickly conduct troop deployments, direct forces and means³³ to threatened areas, and to transfer reinforcements.

Similarly, helicopters can be used for correction of artillery fire and for guiding combat aircraft to targets, allowing for accurate firing and bombing strikes.³⁴

This brief sampling of areas in which helicopters may be used indicates the Soviets' belief in the versatility of that aircraft in local wars. Nothing is perfect however, and they are quick to recognize the obvious: "however, as experience shows, airmobile troops and helicopters (airplanes) suffer large losses from ground fire both during insertion into and extraction from the assault area."³⁵

Surprise

The element of surprise has been relegated to a terminal position in this analysis of Soviet views on local wars not because it is not

a weapons system or branch of service, but because it is a principle that transcends all of the concepts described above. The Soviet discussion of the use of surprise ranges from the low-level tactical employment to the strategic use of surprise to ensure total victory in local wars.

Even today, the Soviets "fondly" relate how, during the Korean War, surprise was the key factor that insured success at the Inchon Landing and the Pusan Breakout. Concealment, disinformation, secrecy, communications security, and limited dissemination of information outside the centralized leadership allowed for surprise (and victory) in these operations.³⁶

Surprise has been the key to success in Middle East actions since 1956. Concealed troop concentrations, night movements, deception, hidden supply bases, disinformation, and the facade of normal operations prior to attack have been the rule, rather than the exception, for success.³⁷ It is the Soviet contention that "the experience of history has shown that surprise attack remains one of the most likely methods to be used by aggressors to initiate local wars."³⁸

Surprise allows the attacker to achieve cardinal changes in the correlation of forces at the outset of a conflict.³⁹ Surprise air strikes and airborne assault landings are the expected method for initiation of hostilities.⁴⁰ Surprise, one is led to believe, is an integral part of and can be the key to victory in a local war.

The Soviet emphasis on the importance of surprise as a means of insuring immediate superiority, and, hopefully, victory in a short period of time, has foundations that go deeper than simple military tactics. Earlier, an attempt was made to show that, using the Soviets' own repertoire of dialectic, the difference between a local war and a war of

national liberation (or a just war) is primarily semantical, i.e., the Soviet side is the right side. However, in the process of describing the course of local wars and wars of national liberation, Soviet writers draw the reader's attention to factors that can make local conflict not only a losing proposition, but also a world conflagration if victory is not quick and the conflict not terminated.

Considering the Soviets' penchant for subjecting the public to their socialist logic, it is only appropriate to explain the above problem in their own words. Only let us presume for once that the Soviets are the aggressors and not the forces of justice. The statements have been allowed to stand by themselves for the sake of emphasis.

One cannot help but notice one rule of local wars. The longer the war drags on, the stronger become the national liberation forces. A small country could not oppose the aggression of an imperialistic power with enough force to win victory in a short time over well-equipped troops of interventionists. Therefore it changes the course of the war into a drawn out partisan struggle during which the forces of opposition are strengthened.⁴¹

...In the course of lengthy local wars (small partisan groups) obtained combat experience and skill, and from them were formed subunits and units. Armies of national liberation were primarily characterized by their waging of partisan warfare. Their combat operations have a spreading character, in the course of which are established regions free of colonizers and their puppets, and gradually the armed conflict spreads throughout the country.

The tendency towards expansion of the scale of local wars and the intensification of the conflict increase the danger of turning wars into world war.⁴²

According to the types of force used in local wars, they can be justifiably be subdivided into wars in which only irregular forces are used or, on the other hand, wars in which regular troops are used with modern weapons. Either only conventional weapons can be used, or the threat exists of escalation into a war with limited use of nuclear weapons and other means of mass destruction.⁴³

As far as concerns contemporary small wars, the danger of their growth into world wars has increased. Historical evidence shows that in the past, small wars served⁴⁴ as the prelude to world wars, speeding up their unleashing.

In its military-strategic and military-technical character, such a war would be significantly different from previous wars. It would be characterized by special strategic goals, new means, methods, and forms of combat operations, and a global scale. The war would take on a coalition character, drawing into its blood letting many nations and⁴⁵ peoples, and would be distinguished by its horrible consequences.

This is why the Soviets want local wars to end quickly and in their favor. The Soviets' own words presented above may be what Mr. Brezhnev was referring to when he said that the Central Committee and the Soviet Government had considered the full ramifications of the situation prior to entering Afghanistan.

If we were to assume the worst (but not impossible situation) and apply the concepts and strategy described up to this point to a contemporary local war, either initiated by or involving our Soviet opponents in, say for example Iran or Poland, what could we expect? The implications are quite strong that the following closing comment succinctly summarizes the thrust of the Soviet viewpoint.

In contemporary local wars there has been wide use of ground forces, air and naval forces, modern air defense means, airborne troops, and the most modern armaments. The physical/geographical conditions of the theater have had great influence on their use. In some wars aviation and air defense played the decisive role; in others, the navy and amphibious landings; and yet in others, ground forces. In addition to this, the experience of local wars once again underscores that success in combat operations can only be achieved by complex use of all services and branches⁴⁶ of the armed forces in close coordination with each other.

Thus we find that, in the final Soviet analysis, a local war flows from the strategic requirements of policy, that it is limited in scope, but in spite of the danger of its escalation, it remains and will continue to be a viable foreign policy option for the Soviet Union.

FOOTNOTES

¹N. V. Ogarkov, "Voyenaya Strategiya," Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. 7, (Moskva: Voennoye Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1979), p. 556.

²Ibid., p. 564.

³T. Kondratkov, "Sotsial'nyy Kharakter Sovremennoy Voyny," Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil, No. 21 (Nov 1972), p. 10.

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷C. Malinovskiy, "Lokal'naya Voyna," Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya, Vol. 5, (Moskva: Voennoye Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1977), p. 21.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰I. Shavrov, "Voprosy Teorii Poslevoyennogo Perioda: Lokal'nyye Voyny i ikh Mesto v Global'noy Strategii Imperializma," Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, No. 3 (1975), pp. 60-61.

¹¹Ibid., p. 60.

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